

FIVE MINUTES OF TERROR

Almost a Panic Among the Park Theatre Audience.

A FIRE IN THE LOBBY.

Brave Officer Genore Stops a Pell Mell Rush for the Doors.

EMMETT'S COOL-HEADED APPEAL

All Reach the Sidewalks in Safety—The Auditorium Uninjured.

It may never be known to a certainty how close some eight hundred people—the audience of the Park Theatre at Broadway and Twenty-second street—came to avert a calamity. The house was crowded at nine o'clock last evening, to meet the fate of those who perished in the Brooklyn Theatre just three years ago. As it was a veritable outbreak of fire occurred at the entrance to the body of the theatre, the alarm was given, as usual, heedlessly by some one, smoke poured into the auditorium, the audience arose in fright and the play came to a dead stop. The element for a panic and a disaster were plainly at hand. But the presence of mind of a police officer and an actor; the promptness of the Fire Department, and, it must be added, the coolness of a large portion of the audience, combined to avert a calamity. The house was cleared without the slightest accident, although before half the people present could get out by the general entrance the smoke and fire forced the remainder back, and the supplementary exits were called into use, some leaving by the stage exits on Twenty-second street and the regular exit on the same street, at the easterly side of the house, while those still in the gallery and balcony were let out by another exit on Broadway. The general opinion last evening was that the fire was caused by the overheating of the wrapping of a steam heater under the lobby steps, where some posters were stored; these caught fire smoldering, and thence the fire was communicated to the woodwork. A gaping hole in the lobby, about three feet by four, where the fire had burst out, showed the floor; some charcoal portions of the lobby, photographs of stage celebrities, and a few of the posters, were seen in the flames. The fire was extinguished by a group of theatre employees, an emptied, darkened house, a silent stage, attested at a quarter past nine what had happened—a grave warning to theatrical managers. Providentially, nothing more fatal to record was implied by this unusual scene.

The audience, in goodly numbers, had assembled at the usual hour of eight o'clock to witness the farcical play of "Fritz in Ireland," in which Mr. J. K. Emmet, the dialect actor, is the chief performer. The play proceeded on its way of comic songs, strained situations, and quaint remarks. The first act ended; the band played and the curtain rose again upon the scene in the ruins of an old abbey. A boy in a soda water next the theatre's four corners before nine o'clock caught the smell of smoke, he entered the lobby and saw it pouring out from under the stairs, rushed to the box office and warned the treasurer, the treasurer rushed to Manager Abbey. Two boy ushers were sent to warn the people on the stage. No symptom of danger had reached the audience. Fritz, in all the glory of dialect English, was singing his song—

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The orchestra was piping away at the accompaniment, and just as the boys came rushing in the audience burst out in applause. But as the boys drew open the doors to enter the auditorium, a cloud of smoke poured in with them. Office John H. Genore (No. 1,015) the strapping, six-foot, blonde-whiskered Officer Genore—was standing on duty at the back of the parquet. He saw the smoke on the boys' faces, saw the ominous puff of smoke that poured in with them, and at once took in the magnitude of the danger. At this critical juncture a man standing at the back, near the entrance, who also saw the smoke, lost his head and shouted "Fire!"

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This was echoed by many, but Mr. Emmet, now appeared on the stage, came forward and addressed the frightened throng—

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SAFELY OUT.

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Officer Genore's coolness was on point on Broadway near the theatre, and when he learned that the building was on fire he immediately sounded the alarm, after which he ran to the Third street station house for the reserves. Standing in front of the theatre, he quickly mustered together a large force of men, at the head of which he started for the theatre. Upon their arrival they found the theatre surrounded by a large crowd of people, who told him to hurry up.

that there had been a number of people trapped to death. He made his way with his men into the auditorium and searched around, but failed to find any. He then went to the balcony and found all managed to reach the street in safety. The damage done is estimated at \$50, and is fully covered by insurance.

Diagram of the theatre—
Subjoined is a diagram of the theatre—
Twenty-second Street.
Stage.
Ent.
Parquet.
A—Spot on the lobby where the fire broke out.
B—Steps from the entrance leading to the parquette and balcony.
C—Where Officer Genore addressed the audience.

MR. ABBEY'S STATEMENT.
Mr. Henry E. Abbey, the manager, said to the Herald reporter: "I spoke to the lobby office when one of the boys came up and told me that there was a lot of smoke in the lobby. I immediately went down to see what was the matter and what could be done. There was some smoke in the lobby, but as far as I could judge, it had not yet penetrated to the auditorium. I did not at first deem it as it would be necessary to disturb the audience. All the door men and ushers were at their several stations, and everything was under perfect control. The stage was well guarded as the front of the house, and I felt perfectly assured of the safety of the audience. There were between eight hundred and one thousand persons in the audience. Our arrangements were such that I am confident we could have subdued what little fire there was without the knowledge of any one away from the front of the theatre if it had not been for the smoke getting through these doors and forcing the audience back. How did the people get out when they knew there was a fire?"

"The ground floor went mostly through the Twenty-second street entrance. Some went through the private boxes and across the stage into Twenty-second street. I think the whole lobby was emptied in a few minutes. When I went into the lobby, intending to speak to the audience and assure them beyond all doubt that the fire was not serious, speaking to them from the stage, and they all walked quietly out. We were not given an opportunity to return to the stage, but as the boys were coming to come again and see the performance."

"How many exits are to the street beside the one where the fire occurred?"
"There are three exits, prepared for an emergency, and could scarcely get into trouble, no matter what side the fire occurred. There are two exits, large ones, from the rear of the house, and two from the gallery. On the ground floor there are two exits of leaving the house beside the one where the fire occurred. There are two exits, large ones, from the rear of the house, and two from the gallery. On the ground floor there are two exits of leaving the house beside the one where the fire occurred."

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him the stage for a bucket of water. I went through the box and the stage door."

"In front of the house?" asked the Herald reporter.

"Yes; through the front of the house."

"Then the audience saw you?"

"Yes; I saw them, but I don't think I attracted their attention."

"Is it to go on the stage that way?"

"Yes; I spoke to the lobby office when one of the boys came up and told me that there was a lot of smoke in the lobby. I immediately went down to see what was the matter and what could be done. There was some smoke in the lobby, but as far as I could judge, it had not yet penetrated to the auditorium. I did not at first deem it as it would be necessary to disturb the audience. All the door men and ushers were at their several stations, and everything was under perfect control. The stage was well guarded as the front of the house, and I felt perfectly assured of the safety of the audience. There were between eight hundred and one thousand persons in the audience. Our arrangements were such that I am confident we could have subdued what little fire there was without the knowledge of any one away from the front of the theatre if it had not been for the smoke getting through these doors and forcing the audience back. How did the people get out when they knew there was a fire?"

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